Training Resources *for the* Environmental Community

TREC

White Supremacy Culture & Professionalism

TREC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resource

This offering is meant to identify behaviors and mindsets that have developed from white supremacist culture that many of us exhibit regardless of our different identities, because we all exist in this culture together and are impacted by it. However, the impact disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in a harmful way that often has long-term consequences both personally and professionally.

Regardless of where you or your organization are in your DEI journey, assessing the impact of white supremacy culture at your organization will help support a more equitable and inclusive organization inside and out.

This offering is not meant to be used to as a weapon to accuse, shame, blame, or reprimand white people or each other. It is meant to share one framework to consider how white dominant culture impacts organizational culture and opportunities to address it over time.

What is this resource?

This resource is a guide to uncovering some of the characteristics of white dominant culture, understanding the impact, and finding ways to address it.

OPTIONAL: This resource includes a follow-up exercise to have a further team discussion and a deeper dive into the topic.

Who is it for?

Individuals (regardless of position) and organizations that are engaged in creating a more inclusive, compassionate, and more 'human' focused organizational culture.

What will you gain from this resource?

- An assessment of how white supremacist culture has been present in the behaviors and attitudes individually and organization wide.
- Identify antidotes or ways to address these biases within your role and organization.
- An assessment of how 'professionalism' is implemented in your organization.
- Identify opportunities to challenge professionalism standards.

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Exercise 1: Characteristics of White Supremacist Culture

Activity Time: 60 minutes

White Supremacist Culture Assessment

Instructions

1. Review the TREC resource, **White Supremacy Traits (*hyperlink*).**
2. Put a star next to 4-5 characteristics that you have observed or experienced the most at your organization.
3. For each of the starred characteristics, respond to the following prompts:
    - How have I exhibited this behavior at work? Consider supervision, decision-making, project management and collaboration, etc.
    - How have these attitudes or behaviors shown up at our organization? Consider overall team dynamics, policies and processes, hiring policies, etc.
    - How can I address and change these behaviors in my role? As an organization?

Exercise 2: Identifying Detours to White Supremacist Culture

Activity Time: 30 minutes

As organizations work to improve their team culture and address white dominant culture, there are some mindsets and behaviors that can impede the process - these are called **detours**. Detours can create a false sense of success and allow organizations to avoid engaging in meaningful work. It's 'easier' and typically less time intensive to develop a DEI statement or complete one optional DEI-related training. Conversely - choosing to review compensation structures and making internal policies and processes more equitable - requires more attention, time, financial investment, and regular assessments for impact. Detours can stop us from doing the hard and necessary work for lasting change and true investment into your team's organizational culture.

Personal Detours Assessment

Instructions

1. Review the TREC resource, **DETOURS (*hyperlink*).**
2. Respond to the following prompts:
    - What are 2-3 of the common detours I have observed at our organization? Consider overall team dynamics, policies and processes, hiring policies, etc.
    - How can I navigate and address these behaviors in my role? As an organization?

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Exercise 3: Professionalism and White Supremacist Culture

Activity time: 60 minutes

One of the biggest ways white supremacist culture impacts organizations is the concept of 'professionalism' in the workplace. Some examples of this are dress code, speech and work style preferences, and timeliness. Racial Equity Trainer, Tema Okun offers a reflection:

> *"Our relationship to the idea of professionalism is shaped by race, class, gender, and how institutions have welcomed us or barred us or required us to assimilate or refused (and often continue to refuse) to acknowledge us."* - Tema Okun, *White Supremacist Culture*

Professionalism Culture Assessment

Instructions

Review the professionalism standards and respond to the following prompts:

- What is your personal relationship and experience with professionalism standards?
- How have you seen these 11 standards of professionalism play out in your workplace? How have you contributed?
- What are some ways you can challenge professionalism standards at an organizational or individual level?

11 Ways 'White' Professionalism is Implemented in Organizations[1]

Types of White 'Professionalism'	How they are Implemented at the Workplace
Psychology/ Implicit Bias	Implicit bias, the automatic and unconscious associations people make based on discriminatory stereotypes, can help us understand some of the psychological processes underlying professionalism. Data from the Implicit Association Test (IAT) show that more people in the United States overwhelmingly have a pro-white preference. This connects with the professionalism tendency to privilege whiteness and white cultural norms.
Media	Pro-white bias is shared through media—in television shows, films, and books—which overwhelmingly feature white Western men as competent leaders and the standard for normalcy. This media conditioning leads to a broad privileging of whiteness that in turn informs the biased workplace standards of professionalism. We see it demonstrated when not only white employers but also employers of color show a preference for white applicants and employees, as white people and people of color are all conditioned to center whiteness.

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Western vs. Non-Western Names	People with non-white sounding names find it more difficult to get responses to their job applications, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research. Another study found that black men with no criminal record were more likely to receive fewer callbacks than white men with criminal records.
Overt and Covert	In Australia, a firm overtly advertised having a preference for white job applicants. More covertly, employers sometimes change the goal posts when it comes to job requirements by demanding unnecessary higher education credentials or years of experience. This discriminates against workers of color who face systemic barriers to obtaining such qualifications. And white privileging of this nature has contributed to increases in the unemployment rates of workers of color in predominantly white work environments across the US and Canada.
Puzzle Pieces	Biased professionalism can also be seen in what workplaces call "cultural fit," a concept exemplified by people describing the ideal employee as someone they would "go to lunch with." Cultural fit most often relates to an applicant's values, behaviors, customs, interests, and even outward appearance. Perceived cultural fit is one of the leading ways professionalism privileges whiteness.
Language	Job applicants or employees who are multi-lingual, non-native English speakers can experience discrimination for not speaking English in the office and/or being see as not speaking English well. This is indicative of a bias towards western and white professionalism that often stems from xenophobia. Research finds that people with a non-native accent—one that does not sound white or 'American'—face a glass ceiling, negatively impacting their promotion trajectory.
Vocabulary and Grammar	Vocabulary and syntax can also be a means for employment discrimination. As people learn the terms of their trade, they desire to use them for the sake of efficient communication. But the push in academic and corporate spaces to use unnecessarily complex vocabulary, syntax, and jargon are accepted codes of biased professionalism. And the absence of academic or corporate vocabulary, syntax, and jargon in cover letters and resumes can lead to hiring discrimination.
Promotions	Biased professionalism often means those who deserve to rise to the top, do not. Both promotion and hiring processes require a great deal of decision-making. There are many opportunities to rely on our biases to provide our rationale of why we did or did not pick an applicant or offer a promotion. These biases directly contribute to lower staff diversity and retention of staff from marginalized identities.
Hiring Metrics	While there has been no collected research relating to hiring metrics and race, research recently found employers read resumes with a gender bias, with those resumes perceived as "feminine" having fewer job prospects. Resume format is something that is often taught in homes—not in schools. If you are a first-generation white-collar worker, these are conversations that you didn't have in your household. It's important to ensure hiring processes don't use resume incidentals, such as the use of bullet points, to unduly guide the determination of who is qualified or not.

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Micromanagement and Termination	Federal laws in the US and Canada prohibit job discrimination based on race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age, disability, and medical history, in addition to prohibiting both disparate treatment (intentional discrimination) and disparate impact (unintentional discrimination). Still, evaluation standards based on the biased codes of professionalism continue to unfairly police and terminate minority employees. Even when workplaces adopt inclusive hiring practices, they can still enact racist managerial practices. For example, in the United States, black workers and other workers of color are monitored more than white workers, and there is a correlation between levels of monitoring with employment termination. While trying to appear inclusive, this style of management presumes that black and minority workers are less competent and cannot be trusted with completing tasks. Professionalism that presumes minority inferiority in relation to white superiority indirectly privileges white workers.
Timeliness	How people manage their time in relationship to work plays a huge role in their success. A 2017 survey found that 41% of all employees are terminated due to lateness. Another study found that workers were often fired for doing personal tasks, using the restroom too often, or being too social with colleagues. In a world driven by capitalism, professionalism has a monochroic relationship to timeliness and work style. It is based on the ability to produce in a timely and orderly manner over relationship building. It centers productivity over people, values time commitments, accomplishing tasks in a linear fashion, and often favors individuals who are white and Western. Within Black and immigrant communities, there is often a deep ancestral connection to polychronic cultural orientation or performing multiple tasks simultaneously. Some people of color push against this by adopting a monochronic orientation, but many hold on to their polychronic work style prioritizing people over product and their personal responsibilities as well as the professional ones. As a result, they may lose their jobs more often in a culture biased against their norms.

[1] *Adapted from the 2019 Stanford Social Innovation Review article, The 'Bias' of Professionalism Standards by Aysa Gray.*

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Optional Exercise: Building Resilient Organizations

Activity time: 2-4 hours

This exercise is a companion offering to the white supremacist culture resource that could support a follow-up conversation with the staff or individually to dive deeper into this topic. Maurice Mitchell is the National Director of the Working Families Party and community organizer working towards a multi-racial working class movement. In November 2022, he wrote a powerful eye-opening essay on 'Building Resilient Organizations' for The Forge, addressing the potential solutions for overcoming some of the biggest problems within progressive spaces.

Instructions

1. Pre-Work
    a. Read Article by Maurice Mitchell, Building Resilient Organizations (audio version) 45-60 min
    OR
    b. Listen to the podcast episode with Maurice Mitchell on The Chris Hayes Podcast, The Debate Inside Progressive Politics with Maurice Mitchell (1hr 5 min)

2. Complete the companion Discussion Guide created by Forge Organizing. ***This step can be completed as pre-work or together as a team.***
    a. If the discussion guide is included as pre-work, review it as a team in a separate meeting (90-120 minutes suggested).

Reflection Questions

1. What themes emerged? Were there any surprises?
2. What was uncomfortable or challenging?
3. What did you learn from this exercise?
4. Where do you see the greatest need to increase representation in your organization?
5. Where do you believe, tactically, you have the greatest opportunity to first implement this work?
6. What specific ways can each member of the organization (all staff, board, ED/CEO) support this work moving forward?

Sources

Tema Okun
Aysa Gray, Stanford Social Innovation Review
The Forge Publication
Wisconsin Conference UCC

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Resources

Resources for BIPOC Experiencing Burnout

- Rest is Resistance – Book by Tricia Hersey
- Healing: The Act of Radical Self-Care - Book by Dr. Joi Lewis
- "Somatics, Healing, and Social Justice in the time of coronavirus" Discussion of Staci Haines book The Politics of Trauma (YouTube)
- Irresistible - Podcast about healing and inspiration for social justice activists.
- Why Self-Care is Crucial for People of Color (and Especially Activists)
- Activists, don't feel guilty about self-care and setting boundaries
- Finding Calm in Chaos: The Virtual Healing Circle Radical Self-Care as Resistance Dr. Joi Lewis (fee but some scholarships may be available)
- Imade on Depression, and the Intersections of Social Justice and Mental Health Black writer and activist (YouTube)
- 55 Mental Health Resources for People of Color

Articles/Essays

- DETOUR-SPOTTING for white anti-racists – Essay by Joan Wilson
- Employers Replies to Racial Names – National Bureau of Economic Research Article
- The 'Bias' of Professionalism Standards – Stanford Social Innovation Review Article
- 10 ways white supremacy wounds white people: A tale of mutuality – American Friends and Service Committee
- The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House – Essay by Audre Lorde

Books

- Emergent Strategy by adrienne maree brown
- White Fragility: Why It's So Hard to Talk to White People About Racism by Dr. Robin DiAngelo and Michael Eric Dyson

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- The Four 'I's of Oppression
- Preparing for Courageous Conversations & Personal Influence

Non-TREC Training Opportunities

- AORTA: Uprooting White Supremacy Training

Other

- White Supremacy Culture – Tema Okun's website with additional resources and content
- White Supremacy Culture in Organizations - Centre for Community Organizations Resource (based in Montreal, Quebec, Canada)
- The Debate Inside Progressive Politics with Maurice Mitchell (Building Resilient Organizations) – Podcast Episode, Why Is this Happening? The Chris Hayes Podcast

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